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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Annual Awards Ceremony

18 September 1968

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Director of Central Intelligence

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

Last year on this occasion we celebrated our twentieth anniversary. We made quite a thing of it: the Vice President spoke and our first twenty-year certificates were awarded. This year's ceremony is on a somewhat lower key, but to my mind is equally important. The twenty-first birthday has a much older symbolism than tenth or twentieth or even fiftieth anniversaries. A young man on his twenty-first birthday reaches maturity before the law. He is a citizen, with a citizen's rights and duties and privileges. He can vote, and can purchase alcoholic beverages.

Today is our twenty-first birthday. Our capacity for drink does not stand in question. Nevertheless, it is a time for assessing whether we as an organization have indeed reached maturity--whether CIA can fulfill its duties as a citizen of the community of government.

What are our duties? Really there is only one that counts--to help the nation make the right choices on the great questions of peace and war in a nuclear age. Our role is to provide the information--and the informed judgment--which will enable the President and his advisers to see through the fogs and smokes and murks that surround national leaders in a tumultuous world. If we can do this even some of the time, we will justify our existence. If we cannot, all else that we do matters very little.

We are in the judgment business. But we must not only produce judgment, we must sell it. Our product must be respected, listened to, sought for. We must have a reputation for accuracy and objectivity. In every struggle over national policy there are many axes being ground. There are reputations at stake and fortunes to be made. Our job is not to support one policy or another--it is to keep the contestants honest. It is to provide that independent judgment which will allow a fair choice.

For we have no axes to grind or fortunes to make on these questions. Our reputations hang simply on honest judgment.

So--if this is to be the standard, how does the record look on our twenty-first birthday? I think we can say that it looks pretty good. There have been mistakes. There have been unavoidable accidents. There have been avoidable ones. But this agency has kept the game honest on a number of occasions.

Think for instance of the epic battles over weaponry that have year by year convulsed this government. This agency brought a recognition that the Soviet Union was not trying to match the United States in manned bombers. This agency established an

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uninflated view of the Soviet missile threat in the early '60s. This agency contrived the first realistic look at the Soviet ground forces since the end of World War II. This agency made and is still defending a sensible assessment of Soviet anti-ballistic missile defenses. In doing these things alone, we have paid for our own budget many times over.

[REDACTED]

This was a startling judgment, and Secretary Rusk remarked "If this is a mistake, it's a beaut." It wasn't a mistake. My point, however, is not that. It is rather that, however startling, our judgment was accepted.

[REDACTED]

The record isn't always that good. There are many things we ought to know and can't find out. There are many others that simply can't be known. When Colonel X decides at midnight that this is the night to "do in" General Y and take over the state, we obviously are not going to know it in advance--there is surely going to be what the newspapers like to call "another intelligence failure." In fact, however, we will have done our basic job if we have told our readers that X hates Y's guts and has the muscle to put his ideas into practice.

That much, at least, we can usually do. And that much is a mark of our maturity. I think I can say on our own twenty-first birthday that we are playing our assigned role. Our judgment is respected, is sought for, is heard.

The skills that go into intelligence success--and sometimes failure--are as broad as this Agency. Our maturity, if it is that, comes from the discipline and intuition of the case officer with ten years' experience. It comes from the ingenuity and patience of men who design peculiar machines and "black boxes." It comes from the researcher who worries his facts until they make sense and worries about his lack of facts until he gets them. It comes from the communicator who is as efficient on his thousandth graveyard shift as on his first, and the keypunch operator who is accurate on his millionth card as on his tenth. It comes from the managers and personnel men and finance men who have learned the hard way how to make the machinery turn smoothly. And finally, it comes from the analysts who make the final judgments and put them into English, that simple, straightforward language which seems so hard to come by.

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I think it shows maturity in an organization when it can do-- with a minimum of fuss--what the Katzenbach Committee required of us in the covert action field. The same can be said of the cuts imposed on our overseas activities by the BALPA exercise, and of the drain on our resources to man and support the Saigon Station. And it can be said of our efforts to develop or adapt new technology for intelligence use. Most people over thirty still feel uncomfortable in the presence of a computer, but we've learned to tolerate them if not to love them. Some of us can even use the term "MIRV" in a sentence.

Finally, this maturity comes out in the discipline and good humor with which our staff has responded to public attack on our integrity, on our motivations, morals, ancestry and what have you. It is no easy thing to stand fast--and silent--when some of the most intelligent young people in this country profess that CIA is the monstrous arm of a police state.

There is another aspect of maturity. When a man reaches twenty-one he stops his physical growth. And so with us, we have stopped growing, and money is tight. We can no longer do everything we think might be useful, only those things that are necessary. Resources must be switched from the important to the more important. The less productive, the superannuated, the good idea gone bad--all must be brutally cut off if we are to do the things we must.

You can take satisfaction from our performance so far. But don't take too much. I have already overworked the maturity metaphor, but there is one more thing that needs to be said of maturity in an organization. It disturbs me and I hope it disturbs you too.

To call a man mature is complimentary; to call an organization mature may not always be. There are sociologists who are drawn, for reasons beyond understanding, to study the genus organization. In their minds maturity means decay, almost fossilization. In what they call a mature organization the best young men are bored away by routine jobs. They are discouraged away by the slow pace of promotion. They are driven away by having to submit to leaders who are less qualified than they. They are bullied away by leaders who resent new ideas for change and improvement. The premium is on the mediocre, on the tried-and-true, on not sticking your neck out, on standing pat.

This organization cannot survive if it reaches that kind of maturity. In our youth we were a turbulent outfit, always changing and reorganizing, experimenting with new ways and new gadgets.

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We made a lot of mistakes--perhaps too many--but we had some good ideas too. We must go on being turbulent. We will indeed make more mistakes, but we must never relax our search for better ways of doing things. Above all we must keep this agency a place where the best young men want to stay, where they will be offered the challenging sort of life which this turbulent new generation is seeking. We want to recruit and hold some of the same young people who now think so ill of us.

This audience has in it the people who can make the Agency that sort of place. It is the ten or fifteen or twenty-year veterans who provide the leadership. If you don't let yourself become stultified, if you ask yourself "what am I offering to the young men in my office?", if you ask yourself "when did we last challenge the whole idea of doing things this particular way?", we will never reach that destructive kind of maturity.

Rather we should seek a sort of youthful maturity--a combination of mature judgment and youthful zest--and stay that way. Twenty-four years from now, when someone else stands here and draws his metaphor from our forty-fifth anniversary, may he find none of the symptoms of middle-age.

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